

Quick Facts

About.... *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*

What is *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*?

Mycoplasma infection is respiratory illness caused by a bacterium called *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*.

What are the symptoms of *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*?

Usual symptoms include fever, cough, bronchitis, sore throat, headache and tiredness. A common result of mycoplasma infection is pneumonia (sometimes called "walking pneumonia" because it is usually mild and rarely requires hospitalization). Infections of the middle ear (otitis media) also can result. Symptoms may persist for a few days to more than a month. Symptoms generally begin 15 to 25 days after exposure. The symptoms generally develop slowly, over a period of two to four days.

How can you get *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*?

Mycoplasma is spread through direct contact with droplets from the nose and throat of infected people especially when they cough and sneeze. Transmission is thought to require prolonged close contact with an infected person. It usually is spread in families, schools, military populations and institutions. The contagious period is probably fewer than 10 days and occasionally longer. Infection is most frequent among school-age children and young adults. Secondary cases of pneumonia among contacts family members and care providers are most frequent.

How is *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* diagnosed?

Mycoplasma infection is usually diagnosed on the basis of typical symptoms. A blood test (which needs to be taken 2 times, one month apart) is helpful in definitive diagnosis, but is not always positive. The use of more specific laboratory tests using throat swabs tested by the PCR method is often limited to special outbreak investigations.

How is *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* treated?

Antibiotics such as erythromycin, clarithromycin or azithromycin are effective treatment. However, because mycoplasma infection usually resolves on its own, antibiotic treatment of mild symptoms is not always necessary. Treatment reduces a person's ability to carry it to another person but doesn't completely destroy the organism from the respiratory tract where it may be present for weeks.

How can *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* be prevented?

At this time, there are no vaccines for the prevention of mycoplasma infection and there are no reliably effective measures for control as with any respiratory disease, all people should cover their face when coughing or sneezing.